

GOVERNMENT  
OF  
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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ZONING COMMISSION

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PUBLIC HEARING

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IN THE MATTER OF: )  
 ) Case No. 05-12  
HOSTELLING INTERNATIONAL )  
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Thursday,  
October 27, 2005

Room 220 South  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

The Public Hearing of Case No. 05-12 by  
the District of Columbia Zoning Commission convened  
at 6:30 p.m. in the Former Council Chamber at 441  
4<sup>th</sup> Street, Northwest, Washington, D.C., Carol J.  
Mitten, Chair, presiding.

ZONING COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

CAROL J. MITTEN	Chairperson
ANTHONY J. HOOD	Vice Chairperson
KEVIN HILDEBRAND	Commissioner (AOC)
JOHN G. PARSONS	Commissioner (NPS)

OFFICE OF ZONING STAFF PRESENT:

SHARON S. SCHELLIN                      Acting Secretary

OFFICE OF PLANNING STAFF PRESENT:

ARTHUR JACKSON  
JENNIFER STEINGASSER

D.C. OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL PRESENT:

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ALAN BERGSTEIN, ESQ.

This transcript constitutes the minutes  
from the public hearing held on October 27, 2005.

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P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

6:42 a.m.

CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

This is a public hearing of the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for Thursday, October 27, 2005.

My name is Carol Mitten and joining me this evening are Vice Chairman Anthony Hood and Commissioners John Parsons and Kevin Hildebrand.

The subject of this evening's hearing is Zoning Commission Case No. 05-12. This is a request by Hostelling International USA for text amendments to Title 11 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations to allow the existing International Hostel at 1009 11th Street, N.W. to be enlarged or rebuilt to the maximum density of the applicable DD/C-3-C district and to exempt the Hostel from the residential use requirement of Section 1706.5B.

Notice of today's hearing was published in the *DC Register* on August 26, 2005 and copies of that hearing announcement are available to you and they are on the table near the door.

This hearing will be conducted in accordance with the provisions of 11 DCMR Section 3021.

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1 The order of procedure will be as follows:

2 We'll take up any preliminary matters and  
3 then we'll have the presentation by the petitioner of  
4 the report by the Office of Planning. Report by any  
5 other Government Agencies. The report by the affected  
6 ANC; in this case it's 2F. Organizations and persons  
7 in support and organizations and persons in  
8 opposition.

9 The following time constraints will be  
10 maintained in this hearing:

11 Organizations will have 5 minutes and  
12 individuals will have 3 minutes.

13 The Commission intends to adhere to these  
14 time limits as strictly as possible in order to hear  
15 the case in a reasonable period of time. The  
16 Commission reserves the right to change the time  
17 limits for presentations if necessary and notes that  
18 no time shall be ceded.

19 All persons appearing before the Commission  
20 are to fill out two witness cards and those cards are  
21 also on the table near the door. Upon coming forward  
22 to speak to the Commission please give both cards to  
23 the reporter who is sitting to our right.

24 Please be advised that this proceeding is  
25 being recorded by the Court Reporter. Accordingly we

1 ask that you refrain from making any disruptive noises  
2 in the hearing room.

3 When presenting information to the  
4 Commission please turn on and speak into the  
5 microphone at the tables in front of us first stating  
6 your name and home address. When you are finished  
7 speaking please turn the microphone off so that it  
8 doesn't pick up any background noise.

9 The decision of the Commission in this case  
10 must be based on the public record. To avoid any  
11 appearance to the contrary the Commission requests  
12 that persons present not engage the members of the  
13 Commission in conversation during a recess or at any  
14 other time. Staff will be available throughout the  
15 hearing to answer any procedural questions and you can  
16 direct those to Ms. Schellin.

17 Please turn off all beepers and cell phones  
18 at this time so as not to disrupt the hearing.

19 At this time we'll take up any procedural  
20 matters. Ms. Schellin, anything?

21 MS. SCHELLIN: Nothing.

22 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Ms. Giordano, anything?

23 Okay. Then I'd invite you to come to the  
24 table and make your presentation.

25 MS. GIORDANO: Good evening, Madam Chair and

1 members of the Commission. For the record my name is  
2 Cynthia Giordano with Arnold and Porter law firm. To  
3 my left is Mr. John Cannon on behalf of the applicant.  
4 He is the Assistant Director of Hostel Development for  
5 Hostelling International USA. And of course Nate  
6 Gross is on my right from Arnold and Porter also.

7 We have a brief presentation this evening.  
8 Mr. Cannon is going to give a little background on his  
9 organization and their Hostel operation in Washington  
10 and what the goals and objectives are for this text  
11 amendment and the importance of it to his  
12 organization. And then Mr. Gross will just briefly  
13 review the zoning issues in the case. So with that  
14 I'd like to ask Mr. Cannon to proceed.

15 MR. CANON: Good evening, Madam Chairperson  
16 and members of the Commission. I'm John Cannon,  
17 Assistant Director of Hostel development with  
18 Hostelling International.

19 I just want to speak very briefly first of  
20 all just to let you know who we are. Our corporate  
21 name is American Youth Hostels Incorporated. We're a  
22 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a charitable  
23 educational mission which is to help all, especially  
24 the young, to gain a greater understanding of the  
25 world and its people through hostelling.

1           And so I wanted to just very briefly  
2           acquaint you with what hostels are since many people  
3           are not familiar with it. They're basically low cost  
4           accommodations that are achieved by using shared  
5           bedrooms, self-service kitchens, shared restroom  
6           facilities, shared common spaces. And they're  
7           typically invaded with a spirit of cooperation and  
8           friendliness. And with Hostelling International we  
9           offer a variety of programs that help our visitors to  
10          become familiar with the many aspects of the cities  
11          and towns and areas in which they're visiting.

12                 The basic typical guest is what we call a  
13          free and independent traveler 18 to 24 years old,  
14          typically international coming from all over the  
15          world. In the District of Columbia this hostel is a  
16          little bit unique in that we get a lot more domestic  
17          travelers in those age categories than most of our  
18          other major urban hostels. But we also get people of  
19          all ages at the hostels, we don't have an age limit.

20                 The other major category of guest is groups.  
21          And we get a tremendous variety of group guests  
22          anywhere from Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, church  
23          groups, school groups, groups of adults, international  
24          groups that are organized.

25                 And in addition to those two main categories



1 of tourists we host many, many people that are coming  
2 to the District of Columbia for a variety of non-  
3 tourist reasons. We host many people who are coming  
4 to various events at the Convention Center. All sorts  
5 of events that are happening on the Mall. Marches,  
6 demonstrations, you name it. Anyplace that there's  
7 people that need a cheap place to stay they're staying  
8 at the hostel.

9 The rates that we charge start at around \$25  
10 per night. So you can see it's quite a difference  
11 from what you're typically paying at a hotel in  
12 downtown Washington.

13 The current situation in this particular  
14 facility is it's a 28,000 square foot building. We  
15 have 250 beds and it's really not quite adequate for  
16 our needs just as it stands, and we've known that for  
17 quite some time and we've had the intention that  
18 someday we will be redeveloping. But what's happened  
19 in the past few years is I'm getting barraged  
20 constantly with telephone calls from people having an  
21 interest in buying our property. And so we felt that  
22 it was really important for us to know what our status  
23 is with this property. And in fact we had a very  
24 serious offer from the people who are developing the  
25 property immediately to our north, the 1010

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1 Massachusetts Avenue property. And our concern is  
2 that if we don't make a decision now, if we decide not  
3 to sell, and all the property around us is developed  
4 and we're left with a 5,000 square foot piece of  
5 property can we redevelop on it or will it be vastly  
6 diminished in value. Because it's just a lone 5,000  
7 square foot piece of property that's not very  
8 attractive to most developers who might want to buy.  
9 So we really need to know, can we redevelop this in a  
10 way that's going to be feasible, financially feasible  
11 for our organization or is it something that we just  
12 need to go ahead and sell now while there's a market  
13 for the building?

14 The difficulty for us is that we love our  
15 location and we think our location is very important  
16 for our operation and we think it's very important for  
17 the city. It's proximity to the Mall makes it very  
18 attractive for all of the people that are our guests  
19 who are coming to see the major attractions in  
20 Washington, D.C. The young people look for this sort  
21 of central city location. They really value it  
22 because it allows them to sort of be injected into the  
23 center of the city and they get to know the  
24 neighborhoods. And it's very important to these  
25 international travelers who are typically very curious

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1 and active and are very thorough tourists.

2 With the groups, the groups find it  
3 critically important to be in a location such as this  
4 because for (1) they have tremendous cost consequences  
5 of having to pay for public transportation. If you  
6 have a group of 50 Girl Scouts and you have to buy  
7 Metro passes for every one of them, it significantly  
8 increases the cost of the trip, sometimes making it  
9 infeasible. And also the difficulty of herding all of  
10 these people on and off of public transportation is  
11 something that they really like to avoid. So for both  
12 constituencies it's very important to be in the center  
13 of the city.

14 And if you look around the world, you find  
15 that all major international cities around the world,  
16 I don't know if there are any exemptions, have  
17 Hostelling International hostels in the center city  
18 somewhere. The city of Chicago thought enough about  
19 it that they gave us \$3 million to help us to develop  
20 a facility at the South Loop in Chicago in 2000.

21 I guess a little bit about the uses. When  
22 we redevelop we're at 250 beds, now we're thinking  
23 that we need to be at 350 beds. Right now we're at  
24 about a little over 100 square foot per bed. Where we  
25 really need to be is something closer to 140 to 150

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1 square feet per bed for the entire facility. And the  
2 reason for that is that we need a variety of common  
3 spaces in the building and we need a variety of  
4 kitchens. Typically the groups need their own  
5 kitchens so that they're not interfering with the  
6 individual travelers who are also cooking their meals  
7 in the facility. And then we need a variety of common  
8 spaces because it's in the common spaces that the  
9 interaction, the intercultural understanding, that's  
10 where everything really happens in the hostel. You  
11 may think if your experience is only hotels, what's  
12 the big deal? But people who stay in hostels they  
13 come there expecting that there is going to be some  
14 common space where they can interact with people and  
15 they expect to have this interaction. They expect to  
16 have friendly interaction with people. Make friends  
17 go out and do things in the city with these people.  
18 And that's the sort of thing that we do very  
19 intentionally to try to encourage this sort of  
20 intercultural understanding that happens in a hostel.

21 So I think that pretty much covers it. All  
22 right. Thank you.

23 MR. GROSS: Nathan W. Gross for the record.

24  
25 The two zoning constraints that we

1 identified that are advertised text amendments as a  
2 way to solve this when Mr. Cannon came to us are:

3 (1) A hostel is currently a subcategory  
4 within the definition of inn in the zoning  
5 regulations. So an inn has various subcategories  
6 including hostel. The problem we noted was that part  
7 of the definition states that central dining other  
8 than breakfast for guests is not allowed. And this  
9 came out of an approach to an inn when the hotel  
10 regulations were updated that basically tried to make  
11 an inn a simple kind of a hotel without a requirement  
12 for a restaurant or common rooms and so on. However,  
13 the prohibition against dining goes against what  
14 hostels like to do, which is to have self-service  
15 kitchens. And in this case they would like to have  
16 two where the guests can prepare their own meals, any  
17 of the meals, and have a common area for dining as  
18 well.

19 And so the advertised text to resolve that  
20 will just stay within the definition of the inn but  
21 make an exemption as follows:

22 For the purposes of this definition  
23 limitation on central dining does not prohibit an inn  
24 from allowing guests to prepare their meals at  
25 centrally located cooking facilities and to eat such

1 meals at a central dining area. So that would solve  
2 zoning issue number one.

3 Zoning issue number two is the property  
4 zoned DD/C-3-C which is a mixed use zone, as the  
5 Commission knows, with a mandatory housing  
6 requirement. And the zoning formula is told in CF9.5  
7 FAR of which 3.5 FAR has to be residential. So that  
8 on this small lot of 5,043 square feet the existing  
9 building is actually at a 9.5 FAR. So that if in  
10 building a new hostel if they could only go to 6 FAR  
11 for the hostel and then had to add a 3.5 FAR  
12 residential component it would be financially  
13 infeasible. You'd have these problems of the elevator  
14 cord using up a lot of space and separate access and  
15 egress for the residential. And it just wouldn't  
16 work.

17 So the second part of the proposed zoning  
18 solution is that for the existing hostel only but not  
19 any future owner or anybody else the housing component  
20 would be waived if a new hostel is built to the 9.5  
21 FAR. And the 9.5 would accommodate about 48,000  
22 square feet and the 350 rooms that Mr. Cannon  
23 described.

24 We also identified the fact that a PUD would  
25 not be an option because it's only 5,000 square feet

1 and minimum land area would be 15,000 for a PUD.

2 We believe that this unique use can justify  
3 the minor change of policy here for this one cited.  
4 This use contributes, we believe, very strongly to  
5 living downtown and the adopted policy goals as the  
6 Office of Planning report has laid out very well. You  
7 have lots of evening activity. You have low cost  
8 accommodations for travelers which are emphasized in  
9 the downtown plan as well.

10 Other than the hostel, really, there's the  
11 Harrington Hotel for regular hotel guests and high  
12 school groups and others and then there's the hostel.  
13 Everything else is business hotels and pretty  
14 expensive.

15 Finally we appreciate the Office of  
16 Planning's creative and beneficial modification that  
17 they proposed to the advertised text in which they  
18 would tie the exception on the housing requirement to  
19 the land area of lot 810 presently. And that way in  
20 case the hostel is able to be part of an assembly in  
21 the southern part of this square, the housing  
22 component to be waived can be allocated and then it  
23 might be more efficient for the hostel to be built as  
24 part of a larger development. So we appreciated that  
25 recommendation by the Office of Planning.

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1 And that's all I will say. Madam Chair, we  
2 would recommend and request that the Zoning Commission  
3 approve the proposed amendments. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Thank you. Anything  
5 else? Okay.

6 Questions from the Commission? Anyone have  
7 questions? I think it's on.

8 COMMISSIONER PARSONS: I do have one. Do  
9 you have a maximum length of stay? Can somebody live  
10 there for a period of 6 months to a year?

11 MR. CANON: No, it varies from hostel to  
12 hostel. I believe in this hostel the maximum length  
13 of stay is just under 30 days. We typically do not  
14 allow a length of stay long enough for the person to  
15 be considered a resident under the local laws.

16 COMMISSIONER PARSONS: That's exactly the  
17 right answer. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Anyone else? Okay.  
19 Thank you.

20 MR. CANON: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: And then we're ready  
22 for the report by the Office of Planning, Mr. Jackson.

23 MR. JACKSON: Good evening, Madam Chair and  
24 members of the Commission.

25 My name is Arthur Jackson, Zoning



1 Development of Youth Specialist in the District of  
2 Columbia Office of Planning. I will present a brief  
3 summary of the overall findings and conclusions in the  
4 Office of Planning's final report.

5 And the applicant basically has presented  
6 the case and they've acknowledged the changes that OP  
7 recommended to Section 1706.2. So essentially the  
8 Office of Planning will stand on the record but state  
9 that we strongly support a proposal to modify the  
10 definition of the inn as advertised and adopt the  
11 proposed amended section 1706.2 just to clarify that  
12 an activity that's normally accommodated with hostel,  
13 which is to the group/individual cooking and eating,  
14 would be allowed in the new facility.

15 With that we will close our comments and  
16 we'll be able to answer any questions.

17 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Okay. Thank you, Mr.  
18 Jackson.

19 Any questions for Mr. Jackson? Commissioner  
20 Hildebrand.

21 COMMISSIONER HILDEBRAND: I did have one  
22 question. It is the intent in your recommendation  
23 that the exemption from not allowing central cooking  
24 also pertains to bed and breakfasts and to tourist  
25 homes, it's not just hostels. So anything in an inn

1 category would then be allowed to have a cooking  
2 facility and a dining facility as long as the meals  
3 were prepared by the guests themselves?

4 MR. JACKSON: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER HILDEBRAND: Okay.

6 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Anyone else? Okay.  
7 Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

8 I don't see anyone here from another  
9 government agency and I don't see anyone here from ANC  
10 2F.

11 And I'll just ask, although I don't see  
12 anyone who is probably going to testify, but is there  
13 anyone who would like to testify in support? Is there  
14 anyone who would like to testify in opposition? All  
15 right.

16 Ms. Giordano, did you want to say anything  
17 in closing?

18 MS. GIORDANO: No, Madam Chair. If the  
19 Commission feels comfortable, we would appreciate a  
20 bench decision. Basically the purpose of the  
21 amendments as indicated are to facilitate keeping this  
22 important facility in our city. Thanks.

23 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Thank you. I think we  
24 are all comfortable with proceeding with a bench  
25 decision. So with that I would move approval of Case

1 No. 05-12 with the amended language as suggested by  
2 the Office of Planning in their October 13th report to  
3 the Commission.

4 VICE CHAIRPERSON HOOD: I'll second.

5 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Thank you. Is there  
6 any discussion? Then all those in favor please say  
7 aye.

8 COMMISSION: Aye.

9 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Mrs. Schellin, we have  
10 none opposed.

11 MS. SCHELLIN: Thank you. Staff would  
12 record the report as zero to one to approve Zoning  
13 Commission Case No. 05-12. Commissioner Mitten  
14 moving. Commissioner Hood seconding. Commissioners  
15 Hildebrand and Jeffreys in favor. I'm sorry,  
16 Commissioners Parsons and Hildebrand in favor.  
17 Commissioner Jeffreys is not present, not voting.

18 CHAIRPERSON MITTEN: Thank you. And just so  
19 it's clear to everybody, that was proposed action and  
20 then after we make a referral to the National Capital  
21 Planning Commission then we would take final action at  
22 a subsequent meeting.

23 Thank you all for coming out tonight. Have  
24 a good evening.

25 We're adjourned.

1 (Whereupon, the above matter was concluded  
2 at 7:03 p.m.)  
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